

Community-Centered Development for Anable Basin Sites

**Proposals by the Community, for the
Community**

September 16, 2019

Prepared By: Hunters Point Civic Association (HPCA)
Contact: Brent O'Leary, President of HPCA
brent.oleary@gmail.com



Summary

INTRODUCTION

More than a dozen neighborhood groups and community-based organizations came together to participate in a two-part event aimed at finding a common vision for development of the area that had previously been targeted for Amazon in Long Island City. The area includes the publicly owned Department of Education Building and adjoining land, the publicly owned land in the 44th Drive Request for Proposal, the private land owned by Plaxall Inc. that is seeking a rezoning and the privately owned land adjacent to the Department of Education Building which is seeking a rezoning known to the community as “Lake Vernon” and which together comprise roughly 22 acres on the waterfront in and around Anabel Basin.

Hosted on April 9th and 16th by the Hunters Point Civics Association (HPCA), the event had officers and representatives of the following community organizations:

Justice For All Coalition

LIC Coalition

Hunters Point Civic Association

Blissville Civic Association

LIC Arts Open

LIC Artists

Hunters Point Community Development Corporation

Hunters Point Park Conservancy

Queensbridge Tenant Association

Ravenswood Tenant Association

Sunnyside Chamber of Commerce

Sunnyside Woodside Action Group

Queens Action Council

and Community Board Members and the Chair of our Community Board's Land Use Committee

These groups were joined by over a hundred residents and business owners from Long Island City along with representatives of our elected officials.

The opinions from these meetings on key issues surrounding development of these “Anable Basin” sites constitute this report’s findings.

MEETINGS

On April 9th, the Municipal Arts Society of New York presented on the development of Long Island City and the previous re-zonings of the area. The Hunters Point Civic then explained each of the four sites and the present plans for developments of these sites. Following the presentation, there was lengthy discussion by the group representatives and attendees. Attendees then participated in a ranked-choice voting, in order to identify where the community might find consensus and determine a clear set of priorities. (Please see attachment A for a breakdown of the results of this voting).

On April 16th there was a follow up meeting structured as a workshop, during which attendees explored the stated priorities in greater detail and then proposed a more comprehensive vision for each.

On Saturday, April 20th, the Hunter’s Point Civic Association next presented to the Queensbridge Tenant Association on the four sites and the results of the April 9th and 16th Meetings. The Queensbridge residents then discussed the developments and conducted the ranked-choice voting. The opinions collected from Queensbridge residents are reflected herein and in the breakdown in attachment A.

OUTCOME AND OVERARCHING GOALS

From these meetings, discussions, and surveys, the community* concluded that developers must state how they would address the following overarching goals:

One comprehensive and integrated plan for all four (4) sites that includes:

- A continuous, uninterrupted waterfront greenway with a substantial amount of park land and green space
- A minimum of two (2) schools
- Resiliency, flood mitigation and carbon neutrality measures
- A community center for arts, recreational sports and meeting space
- No net-decrease in the amount of publicly-accessible land
- Quality jobs during construction and post-construction
- Space for commercial retail, manufacturing, small businesses development and artists
- Truly affordable housing
- Medical facilities

COMMUNITY MUST HAVES, DETAILED

I. A unified, holistic plan that addresses the area's extreme vulnerability to flooding and accounts for the impact of new development on the greater LIC community.

There was a clear consensus that development of the four properties must be planned as a *whole* and that segmented planning works *against* responsible development.

Furthermore, planning must take into account LIC's greater challenges—namely, its location in a flood plain, its lack of infrastructure, its deficit of services and school seats, the displacement of artists and small businesses, and the area's lack of affordable housing. There were fears that segmentation would prevent the inclusion of a continuous

waterfront greenway and divide up the neighborhood detrimentally. The Municipal Arts Society who presented at the April 9th meeting, stated that a single comprehensive plan would help ensure the creation of a continuous waterfront greenway needed for resiliency and green space and that it could and should require one Environmental Impact Study (for all four parcels).

II. Resiliency in the face of climate change and sea-level rise

As noted, the properties in question are in a flood plain, and Anable Basin, which sits at its lowest point, already experiences “sunny-day flooding.” The area, which has been projected to be at risk of going under water by 2050, is a natural wetlands and should be utilized as such in order to act as a sponge against sea level rise (and to prevent water from being pushed to inland areas). The rain-capture and flood-mitigation features of Hunters Point South Park were cited as an excellent model that should be replicated on the north end of the waterfront. Last, soil and land preservation that allows for coastal ecosystems to thrive is seen as important for the area’s sustainability and quality of life.

For many residents who were in attendance, the experience of Superstorm Sandy is still fresh. They want new construction to use the highest waterfront resiliency standards, meet Living Building Challenge standards in order to reduce the area’s carbon footprint, and be kept sufficiently away from the waterfront. They understand that if Long Island City is not resilient against sea-level rise, all other goals may be for naught.

III. Continuous and Active Waterfront / Shaded Areas

One of the highest ranking concerns was the extension of the park both to the north and south of Anable Basin, creating an uninterrupted waterfront greenway. The contiguous extension of Hunters Point South Park with Gantry Plaza State Park has been seen as a huge success. A continuous waterfront with open access (unblocked by buildings) is needed for two key reasons: 1) to absorb excess water (as stated above) and 2) to provide the community with much-needed green space. Long Island City still has the one of the lowest per capita allocation of green space in NYC and given the projected volume of new residents coming to LIC, the 1-2 acres cited in the 44th Drive RFP proposals for the area is utterly inadequate. There was a clear desire to use this public land of 44th Drive for a larger amount of green space instead of residential or commercial.

Residents expressed hopes of having an active waterfront, including kayaking or boat-launch sites, a skating rink, and extended bike lanes. They also discussed the importance of shaded areas, particularly for children and seniors who need to cool off in hot weather. Residents pointed out that one of the biggest flaws of Hunters Point South Park is its lack of shade. They expect to see this addressed in any RFPs that include open green space.

IV. Public Land for Public Use

Participants strongly agreed that public land in this area should be saved for public use and that granting long-term leases to developers for their private gain is tantamount to selling (which for land along the waterfront is illegal). Long-term leasing of public land was also seen as unethical, as it deprives the community of its proper use. It was made clear that there should be no net loss of public access resulting from development on any of the sites.

The Department of Education Building (over 500,000 square feet) was seen as an extremely valuable asset and chance to fulfill many of the community's needs set forth here. The fact that a Department of Education Building would be sold off to private interests at the same time the School Construction Authority has been telling the community there is no space to build new schools in the neighborhood was the subject of much criticism.

V. New Schools

Given the neighborhood's projected population growth and its current deficit of school seats, building a minimum of two new schools—K-6 and middle grades—was seen as critical. Since the School Construction Authority has stated that they cannot find locations in the area to build new schools, it is imperative that these facilities be part of any bid for development in Anable Basin and tied to an enforceable community benefits agreement. Participants discussed at length the need to keep schools open to all students in surrounding neighborhoods and that situating schools in this area would help bridge the Hunters Point and Queensbridge communities. There was also discussion of creating an educational “village” organized around tech and life sciences in collaboration with Cornell Tech.

VI. Community & Recreation Center

This was identified as a critical need that would benefit the neighborhood in myriad ways—providing a hub for indoor activities (for children, teenagers, and adults), senior services, special programming, environmental studies, a tech/job incubator, an arts center, and artisan/maker space. Other requested facilities were a community meeting space

for civic engagement, an indoor gymnasium, a public indoor/outdoor swimming pool, a cultural/performing arts center, an art exhibition space, and rooms for after-school and continuing education programs, job/vocational-training, and summer camp programs. The massive Department of Education building was again cited as ideal for housing the center (and would still have ample space for schools). As Anable Basin is situated between Hunters Point and Queensbridge, a community center here could be pivotal in tying the two communities together.

VII. Real Affordable Housing- The consensus was that due to our neighborhood's severe lack of existing infrastructure to fit the needs of what amounts to a new town's worth of residents in the area, that either no residential units should be planned for these properties, or only a plan that allows for deeper levels of affordable housing for a much higher percentage of the total units developed.

VIII. Quality Post-Development Jobs

Marked as especially important to the Queensbridge community, this need was identified as a top priority to ensure that job openings which result from these developments would have a fair chance of being filled by unemployed or underemployed residents in our communities.

IX. Retail Space

There is a serious deficiency of retail storefronts in the area, and many community residents noted the burden of going to other neighborhoods to purchase everyday items. Mixed use and commercial development, which provides space with manageable rents so that small businesses and commercial retail can flourish, must be part of any acceptable plan.

X. Medical Facilities

A significant number of participants cited the need for medical facilities that could house a birthing center or E.R. Though we had not included this item in our survey, it was written-in by attendees in the “other” category.

CONCLUSION

As the proposed Amazon experience showed, it is vital to get the neighborhood involved early in the planning stages of large developments in their communities. This 22 acres of waterfront property and land will have a large impact on the future of Long Island City and significantly impact the lives of the residents and businesses. Given that much of this land is public which should be used for public benefit and that the other property owners are seeking a public benefit to re-zone to increase the value of their property which will add additional infrastructure burden to the area, the neighborhood should be integrally involved in the decision making for these developments.

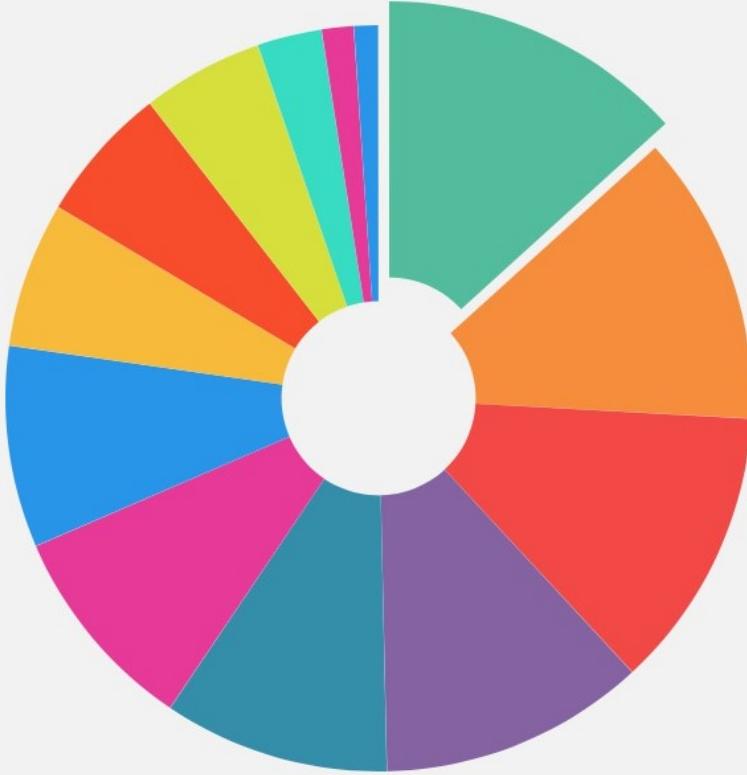
It is clear from our meetings, discussions and survey that the present proposals for these areas were not viewed favorably at all and would face significant opposition. The community is supportive of development of the area that will address the critical issues and needs set out above.

We created this report as a tool to understand the concerns and issues faced by the area and to be a resource to begin a dialogue with the community in relation to development of the sites to address the issues set forth.

Note: While there was a consensus that there should be an overarching plan for all of LIC to address these and other critical issues such as sewage repairs and transportation infrastructure, these were not included in this report as we did not feel as though these were issues that could be reasonably addressed by developers related to these sites due to their scope.

We want to thank all the people and groups who helped compile and assisted with the meetings and with the making of the report including Lisa Rosen, Tom Paino and Diane Henry and LIC Coalition and the meetings and materials on the topic put together by Justice for All Coalition.

Attachment A



- Continuous Waterfront, Parks & Green Space
- Public Schools
- Waterfront Resiliency & Sustainability
- Truly Affordable Housing
- Public Community Center
- Quality Jobs Across an Income Spectrum
- Recreational Center & Facilities
- One Comprehensive, Integrated Plan
- Retail & Maker Space
- Affordable Artist Space
- Union-Made & Maintained
- Other (Write In)
- Connection to Cornell Tech & Roosevelt Island